

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 14214 01 OF 02 311901Z

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-04 INR-05 LAB-01

NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 L-01 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 FEAE-00 NIC-01

SAJ-01 CIEP-01 SAM-01 INT-05 /070 W

----- 057576

R 311820Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5266

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 14214

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, UK, PINT

SUBJECT: RENEWED CONTENTION IN THE COAL FIELDS

REF: LONDON 12669

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE EXECUTIVE OF THE NATIONAL UNION
OF MINERS (NUM) REJECTED YESTERDAY (OCTOBER 30) IN A
NARROW VOTE (14-12) A PRODUCTIVITY PROPOSAL BY THE
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PAGE 02 LONDON 14214 01 OF 02 311901Z

NATIONAL COAL BOARD DESIGNED TO RESOLVE URGENT COAL

SUPPLY NEEDS AND TO CONTRIBUTE TO LONGER TERM LABOR-MANAGEMENT STABILITY IN THE COAL FIELDS. NUM PRESIDENT JOE GORMLEY HAS PUBLICLY CHARGED THE COMMUNIST PARTY WITH LEADING THE DRIVE TO CAMPAIGN TO REJECT THE NCB PROPOSAL. IF THE MINERS, WHEN THEY ARE BALLOTTED INDIVIDUALLY ON THE PROPOSAL IN ABOUT TWO WEEKS' TIME, SUSTAIN THE NUM EXECUTIVE'S RECOMMENDATION -- WHICH IS VERY LIKELY -- THE NEXT ROUND OF WAGE NEGOTIATIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE VERY TOUGH INDEED AND COULD POSE A REAL PROBLEM FOR THE LABOR GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY

2. STRIPPED DOWN TO ITS ESSENTIALS, THE NCB PROPOSAL -- ALREADY MODIFIED TO MEET A NUMBER OF NUM DEMANDS -- WOULD HAVE PROVIDED AN AVERAGE OF 12.50 POUNDS A WEEK' IN ADDITION TO BASE PAY, FOR FACE WORKERS AND 8.12 POUNDS FOR ALL OTHER WORKERS, BEGINNING DECEMBER 4. THE PRODUCTIVITY BONUS WOULD HAVE VARIED PIT BY PIT -- INSTEAD OF FACE BY FACE (A CONCESSION TO THE NUM) -- BASED ON NORMS TO BE WORKED OUT LATER. LEADERS OF THE NUM LEFT WING, THIS TIME LED BY ARTHUR SCARGILL, A YORKSHIREMAN WHO IS FREQUENTLY REFERRED TO AS A MARXIST, ALTHOUGH HE IS BELIEVED TO HAVE LEFT THE COMMUNIST PARTY, HAS STRONGLY OPPOSED A PIT BY PIT OR FACE BY FACE AGREEMENT NOT ONLY BECAUSE THEY FAVOR EQUAL BONUS PAYMENTS TO ALL MINE WORKERS, BUT BECAUSE ANYTHING OTHER THAN A NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY AGREEMENT WOULD TEND TO SHIFT THE CENTER OF GRAVITY OF UNION POWER TO SOME EXTENT AWAY FROM THE NATIONAL AND TOWARD THE LOCAL LEVEL. IN THAT SENSE, IT COULD LIMIT THE LEFT'S CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE THE CALLING OF A NATIONAL COAL STRIKE SUCH AS THE ONE WHICH TOOK PLACE LAST WINTER. SOME MODERATES ON THE EXECUTIVE WHO REPRESENTED MEN WORKING LOW-PRODUCING COAL SEAMS ALSO SUPPORTED THE LEFT WING'S ARGUMENTS. HOWEVER, OTHER NUM LEADERS, SUCH AS LEN CLARKE FROM NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, REPRESENTING MINERS FROM HIGH PRODUCING COAL SEAMS, STRONGLY FAVORED THE NCB PROPOSAL.

3. IN ANY EVENT BOTH NCB OFFICIALS AND THOSE NUM LEADERS, PARTICULARLY JOE GORMLEY, WHO STRONGLY SUPPORTED THE PROPOSAL, ARE EXTREMELY DISTURBED BY THE VOTE. THE NCB LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 LONDON 14214 01 OF 02 311901Z

IS VERY CONCERNED NOW THAT COAL PRODUCTION WILL FALL SIX TO EIGHT MILLION TONS SHORT OF ITS 120 MILLION TONS OF COAL TARGET DURING THE CURRENT FINANCIAL YEAR (NCB DEPUTY CHAIRMAN NORMAN SIDDALL WAS "BLOODY STAGGERED" BY THE DECISION.)

4. IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE EMBASSY LABOR ATTACHE, GORMLEY CALLED THE VOTE A "FIASCO" AND REITERATED PUB-

LISHED REPORTS THAT THE COMMUNIST PARTY WAS BEHIND THE
DEFEAT IN THE EXECUTIVE. (IN A TV BROADCAST HE CITED
CP INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZER BERT RAMELSON AS A KEY LEADER
OF THIS DRIVE.) HE AGREED THAT MICK MCGAHEY, THE
COMMUNIST VICE PRESIDENT OF THE NUM, HAD BEEN RELATIVELY
QUIET IN CONTRAST TO HIS WINTER STRIKE ROLE, BUT HE
NOTED THAT MCGAHEY WAS NOW TURNING TO A "MORE THAN 30
POUND" WAGE TARGET FOR THE NEXT NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE
NCB. AS GORMLEY PUT IT, THE "LEFT-WINGERS ARE TRYING
TO BLOODY OUTBID EACH OTHER NOW AS TO WHO CAN SUPPORT
THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE CLAIM."

5. COMMENT: OF COURSE, THE MINERS COULD STILL OUTVOTE

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PAGE 01 LONDON 14214 02 OF 02 311832Z

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 14214

THEIR EXECUTIVE WHEN THE INDIVIDUAL BALLOTS ARE TAKEN, BUT THIS IS NOT CONSIDERED VERY LIKELY. IF THE EXECUTIVE IS SUSTAINED, THE PRESSURE FOR A HIGH SETTLEMENT IN THE NEXT WAGE GO-ROUND WILL BE EXTREMELY STRONG AS GORMLEY PREDICTS.

6. AT THE SAME TIME THE CLOSENESS OF THE VOTE (GORMLEY, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 LONDON 14214 02 OF 02 311832Z

AS PRESIDENT, VOTES ONLY WHEN THERE IS A TIE) INDICATES THE DEEP SCHISM WITHIN THE NUM ON THE ISSUE WHICH COULD, IN THE LONGER TERM, LEAD TO A DEEPER DIVISION WITHIN THE UNION. THE PIT BALLOTS IN TWO WEEKS' TIME WILL INDICATE MORE CLEARLY WHETHER THE COAL FIELDS MAY ONCE AGAIN BECOME THE CENTER OF CONTENTIOUS WAGE NEGOTIATIONS IN THE NEXT ROUND.

7. AN IMPORTANT SOURCE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT TOLD US HE WAS "FAIRLY CONFIDENT" HOWEVER, THAT THERE WILL BE NO THIRD MAJOR STRIKE IN THE COAL FIELDS "EVEN IF THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO ACCEPT THE NUM'S DEMANDS." HE ALSO BELIEVES THAT THE UNION'S WAGE NEGOTIATING TIMETABLE THIS TIME AROUND WILL BRING THE CRISIS TIME MUCH CLOSER TO MARCH WHEN THE CURRENT WAGE AGREEMENT RUNS OUT -- AND THEREFORE NEARER THE PERIOD OF WARMER WEATHER. HIS OPTIMISM REMAINS TO BE TESTED.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, POLITICAL LEADERS, LABOR UNIONS, COAL MINING, LABOR STRIKES, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 OCT 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974LONDON14214
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740311-0844
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974103/aaaaachp.tel
Line Count: 209
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: LONDON 12669
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <03 APR 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <07-Aug-2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RENEWED CONTENTION IN THE COAL FIELDS
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, UK, NATIONAL COAL BOARD, NATIONAL UNION OF MINERS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005